

Sex in the Age of Coronavirus

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replying to [The Editors, "The Coronacrisis and our Future Discontents"](#)

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Disaster makes the old truths plain.

The Angel of Death is passing over the earth once again, and the Angel of Death is us. We are a very serious danger to one another in the age of coronavirus, which is why our authorities are asking us to close our doors, stay home, and resist making any kind of contact that might spread the disease. This, because God is a poet with a grim sense of gallows humor, includes casual sex.

"Opinion: Phone Sex is Safe Sex." So ran a [headline](#) in the *New York Times* late this March, imploring horny urbanites to "postpone your hookup. Get off on Skype instead." The New York City Health Department issued a [guide](#) to Sex and Coronavirus Disease which advised that "[you](#) are your safest sex partner" under the heading "have sex with people close to you." "The next safest partner," said NYC Health, "is someone you live with."

This tortured and vague phraseology is doing its best to talk its way around a plain and (for some) extremely uncomfortable reality: all the best sex right now is being had by married couples and committed, monogamous partners who live together. The [chipper](#) sex-ed [lingo](#) of our public schools—multiple partners can be fun! Explore safe anal play!—was always and only designed to candy coat over the obvious fact that anonymous sexual adventurism is awkward, painful, and deadly dangerous.

You can wave those truths away with a bland smile when your society is rich and prosperous, and when the children to whom you are selling degeneracy will go off and ruin themselves out of your sight so you don't have to be confronted with the fruits of your teaching. But when an infectious respiratory illness stalks grimly just outside your door, it is no longer quite so easy to tell yourself and others the lie that hookups without meaning are also hookups without cost.

No one would have wished the ravenous spread of COVID-19 on the world. But anyone with a biblical education (or even just a highly developed sense of irony) could have foreseen that the quest for endless sexual liberation was not going to end well. Its current spectacular backfire can only be taken as a little parable, a concentrated illustration of what was already going on all around us.

The people who were promised an infinite supply of satisfying, no-holds-barred joyrides are now locked up at home with nothing but their hands and a smartphone, while the people whose sex life is also a love life are getting hella busy. In truth, this was always the natural destination of each respective life path. Unfettered sexual profligacy leads to a dotage of solitude and self-loathing, while discipline and fidelity lead to an

efflorescence of resilient delight springing from mutual love and trust. This is not some chattering moralist bromide: it is the way of the world. Sometimes it just takes a crisis for us to see it.

Here at The American Mind, we were asked whether quarantine will bring people back in touch with the realities of their embodied selves, or whether it will drive them deeper down the path of digital Gnosticism. Will a quarantined population realize that their bodies are not meat sacks to be transcended but fleshly temples in which the Spirit of God may dwell? Is this a wakeup call or a death knell?

To put the question in less thunderous terms, will people emerge from lockdown seeking less perilous, more stable partnerships? Or will watching porn online be enough to tide them over until they return, dead-eyed and learning nothing, to the endless firing line of one-night stands?

I do not think the answer is predetermined. The rudiments of both developments are there—when people are forced by disaster to encounter the brute truths of their nature, they are bound to discover that they are both wonderfully made and terribly fallen.

That means that we, the old-fashioned of whatever age, have an opportunity to make our case. We have to take it. It is neither likely nor desirable that we will reconstitute the world of the 1950s altogether. Nevertheless, some basic return to sanity and prudence may—but not must—be in the cards. The truth is on our side, but it is not so manifest that people will come to it spontaneously and unaided. The centuries of religious teaching, the generations of social wisdom that lie behind us must be marshaled once again for a people that has forgotten them. In the wake of this terrible catastrophe, they may be more ready than usual to listen.

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